

Time for change: No more 'spring ahead' and 'fall back'

EXHIBIT 18
DATE 2/15/2011
HB 500

The 62nd Montana Legislature has a host of big things on its agenda, including the state budget, education funding, workers' compensation insurance reform, reshaping drunken driving laws, broadening who has the power of eminent domain, and much more. But among the more than 2,000 bills in the hopper are some relatively simple ones that could have far-reaching effects. One of those is Senate Bill 178 by Sen. Terry Murphy, R-Cardwell. It would exempt the state from a twice-a-year process that often distresses parents, pet owners, and grade- and preschool teachers statewide: daylight-saving time.

We have nothing against daylight-saving time — in fact, we prefer it. What we don't like is changing the time twice a year.

Therefore, we'd recommend a small change to Sen. Murphy's bill, which was heard Wednesday by the Senate Business, Labor and Economic Affairs Committee and appeared likely to make it to the Senate floor.

Turn it around: Exempt the state from *standard* time during the winter, keeping Montana's clocks on daylight time year-round.

Daylight-saving time has been around for more than a century in some form and in some places. As a result, many studies of its effects have been performed, with, unfortunately, a mixed bag of results. Most of the negative effects, however, were related to the changeover, not to the time itself.

One of the most interesting is that there's a spike in heart attacks in the first week after we "spring ahead" on the second Sunday of March (the 13th this year).

Then, there's a not-quitecorresponding dip in heart attacks in the fall when we "fall back" on the first Sunday of November. They figure the changes are related to losing an hour of sleep in the spring, and to getting it back in the fall.

Some studies have found small but significant (1 to 2 percent) declines in traffic accidents during daylightsaving time — and as much as a 5 percent decline in accidents involving pedestrians.

The worst thing about the twice-a-year time changes, though, is the disruption it causes among children and domestic animals.

Grade school teachers say they dread that period in March after the hour of sleep is lost.

Spring fever already is setting in among the young ones, and try as parents might, navigating the sudden transition to daylight time is not easy.

Pets, too, are creatures of habit, so the sudden change in morning routines caused by shifts in the sunrise time relative to when their humans go to work or school can be upsetting — if only to the humans involved.

Congress recognized the advantages of daylight- saving time in 2005.

It stopped short of a total conversion, but it extended daylight time by four weeks, to about eight months' duration.

Now would be a good time for Montana to lead the way to the final step: Eliminate standard time altogether.

Our opinion